



Ontario
Energy
Board | Commission
de l'énergie
de l'Ontario

May 01, 2020.

BY EMAIL

To: All Electricity Distributors
All Natural Gas Distributors
All Unit Sub-meter Providers
LEAP Lead and Intake Agencies

Re: **LEAP Emergency Financial Assistance and COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program (CEAP)**

On March 25, 2020, the government announced it would be expanding the eligibility of the Low-income Energy Assistance Program to provide direct support in the amount of \$9M to families facing difficulty in paying their electricity and natural gas bills as a result of COVID-19.

The Ontario Energy Board (OEB) is currently working with the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines (Ministry) in identifying the appropriate structure, eligibility and delivery of the expanded program, which is being referred to as the COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program or CEAP.

To LEAP lead and intake agencies, the OEB and Ministry staff understand the strain on resources the current pandemic may be having on your ability to handle an increase in new clients and requests for assistance, not only for LEAP Emergency Financial Assistance, but for all the other services your agencies provide within your communities. We wanted to take this opportunity to let you know that the OEB and Ministry are discussing how to implement CEAP so that it does not put additional requirements on LEAP agencies during this critical time. We will be providing additional information in the coming weeks on eligibility criteria, program delivery and how and when consumers can apply, including simplifying information requirements and streamlining application processes recognizing the widespread impact of the pandemic.

As you will also be aware, the OEB recently extended the winter disconnection ban to July 31, 2020 for electricity distributors ensuring no one is disconnected for non-payment. Natural gas distributors and many unit sub-meter providers have also announced they will not disconnect for non-payment until July 31st. A key consideration in eligibility for LEAP Emergency Financial Assistance is that the consumer be disconnected, or be facing disconnection, for non-payment. While the LEAP Manual does provide discretion for agencies to consider approving LEAP funds when a consumer is not immediately facing disconnection, OEB staff are asking agencies not to utilize that discretion at this time to ensure there are LEAP funds available when the disconnection ban has lifted.

We have also heard from some LEAP agencies that they are currently seeing an increase in calls from COVID-19 impacted individuals who have been referred to the LEAP agency by their utility. In many instances, the individuals do not meet the LEAP criteria and are expressing frustration at the process. Current thinking about the implementation of CEAP is to tie it to end of the disconnection ban, the same timeline for LEAP availability to address these concerns.

We ask that utilities not refer customers to their LEAP agencies for LEAP funding given the extended disconnection ban timelines and in the absence of early agency interventions for consumers who are not facing immediate disconnection. Instead, please provide information about LEAP to your customers and explain that the LEAP agencies are expected to be in position to accept LEAP applications closer to the end of the disconnection ban. This will reduce pressure on agencies' limited operational resources at this time and maximize funds available for when the ban ends.

We thank you in advance for your cooperation and will be in touch as soon as possible with more information on CEAP. If you have any questions related to this letter, please contact Donna Kinapen at donna.kinapen@oeb.ca.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Brian Hewson
Vice President, Consumer Protection & Industry Performance